

Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers June 16, 2005

NETS Feature

Michigan NETS Traffic Safety Symposium

Don't miss out on an opportunity to attend the Michigan NETS Traffic Safety Symposium taking place on August 17, 2005 and sponsored by the Michigan NETS Advisory Board. The Symposium will take place at Steelcase Town Hall located in Grand Rapids. The Symposium will have nationally recognized speakers present on topics including: Risk Assessment and Negligent Entrustment; Defensive Driving Training Opportunities; Fleet Safety; Automotive Technologies and resources to enable you to implement traffic safety programs in your workplace. Internationally known, Dr. Jim Reese, will present the key note address on learning the necessary skills to overcome the effects of stress. On-line information including a registration form to attend this Symposium is now available at the following link: <http://www.michigan.gov/michnets/0,1607,7-188--120009--,00.html> For additional information please contact Dan Vartanian at (517) 333-5322 or e-mail: vartanid@michigan.gov

Drive Safely Work Week 2005 Campaign Materials Now Available

The National Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) is pleased to announce the official launch of the 2005 Drive Safely Work Week (DSWW) campaign. Although the campaign is officially observed on October 3-7, organizations now have access to all of the campaign materials on our website, www.trafficsafety.org, making it convenient for employers to begin planning a memorable week for their workforce....More: http://www.trafficsafety.org/newsletter/dsww_061505feat.asp

Latest Traffic Safety News

GMAC Study: Millions Of Drivers Lack Basic Driving Skills

A new GMAC study suggests that millions of Americans lack the basic knowledge of road rules and how to operate a vehicle safely. According to the study's research, nearly 20 million Americans would fail a state driver's test, with one in 10 drivers not earning a passing score. More than 5,000 licensed drivers between the ages of 16 and 65 were administered the 20-question survey, which was designed to measure basic knowledge about traffic laws and safety. Based on the results, drivers in Oregon knew the rules of the road best with an average score of 89 percent, while drivers in Rhode Island fared the worst with an average of 77 percent. For more information visit http://www.cnn.com/2005/AUTOS/05/26/drivers_study/

GM To Build Rollover Crash Test Facility

General Motors recently announced its plans to build a new rollover testing facility at its Milford Proving Ground in Michigan. The \$33 million testing investments are expected to grow the automaker's global testing capability. The rollover facility will be used to develop rollover-sensing systems for air bags and occupant protection systems to reduce the likelihood of ejection in a crash. It is estimated that more than 10,000 people are killed and more than 200,000 are injured in rollover crashes each year, accounting for about one in four highway deaths. Read the release at <http://media.gm.com/servlet/GatewayServlet?target=http://image.emerald.gm.com/gmnews/viewmonthlyreleasedetail.do?domain=74&docid=15681>

Safety Groups: Tire Regulation Gives False Sense Of Safety

Tire manufacturers and safety groups are calling on the federal courts to invalidate the government's new ruling on tire pressure monitoring systems, saying the regulation gives drivers a false sense of safety. The rule, which was issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), requires automakers to install tire pressure monitoring systems by 2008. To comply, it is probable that automakers will attach tiny sensors to each wheel that alerts drivers when the tire falls 25 percent below the recommended inflation pressure. However, safety advocates say the rule doesn't require the systems to operate with replacement tires, and would only be activated when traveling 30 to 65 mph. More information on this story: http://news.yahoo.com/s/cpress/20050607/ca_pr_on_he/tire_pressure

Rental Car Companies Go High Tech

A growing number of rental cars are being equipped with satellite navigation systems and other high-tech gadgets. Hertz, who currently has 50,000 vehicles in the USA and Canada equipped with GPS technology, expects to add 10,000 more by the end of this year. Meanwhile, Avis rents a portable navigation device that can plug into any car. The device is available in 67 cities with plans to expand in 12 more this year. Many business travelers welcome the devices, particularly their ability to guide them through unfamiliar cities. Some say they choose which company to use based on the availability of the devices. Read the full article at http://www.usatoday.com/money/autos/2005-06-06-rental-tech-usat_x.htm

Survey: Truckers Have Little Understanding Of Brake Adjustment

A new survey conducted by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance as part of the Operation Air Brake revealed that a shockingly low number of truck drivers in North America have a clear understanding of air brakes and brake adjustment. The survey polled 4,055 commercial truck drivers across 60 jurisdictions in North America. Of those drivers, only 15 provided the correct response to all questions involving knowledge of brake adjustment. Read the full article at <http://www.todaystrucking.com/displayarticle.cfm?ID=4080>

Workers Using Wireless Devices While Driving Carries Risk For Employers

Cell phones and other personal digital assistants are a great way to boost employee productivity, but recent lawsuits are revealing serious and costly pitfalls. One of the most common lawsuits occurs when an employee is involved in a traffic crash while using one of these devices for work-related purposes and is found at fault for the crash. Employers have either settled or been found liable for such cases. While cell phones get most of the attention, experts are warning employers about their employees' use of other types of electronics while driving, as well. Read the full article at <http://sacramento.bizjournals.com/sacramento/stories/2005/06/06/focus4.html>

Study: Alcohol Worsens Fatigued-Driving Impairment

A new study investigated the effects of nighttime restrictions and elevated blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels on afternoon driving performance. The researchers found that while sleep restriction alone produced significant impairments on driving, alcohol alone did not. However, alcohol combined with sleep restriction significantly worsened driving performance. The results indicate that there is no safe level of alcohol intake for fatigued drivers.

Source: Human Psychopharmacology. Authors: P.R. Barrett, J.A. Horne, L.A. Reyner

Music Sharing To Hit The Road?

Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University are developing a system for cars that would allow a driver to broadcast music to any other vehicle within a 30-mile radius. Known as "roadcasting," the project would allow drivers to stream their MP3 music collections by Wi-Fi or similar technology to any other vehicle within a range that is equipped with compatible hardware and software. The researchers also

suggest that the technology could serve as nodes and pass on traffic information that would help drivers choose the most efficient routes to their destinations. Read the full article <http://www.wired.com/news/digiwood/0,1412,67653,00.html>

Advancements In Whiplash Expected

There are an estimated 272,000 whiplash injuries each year from rear-end collisions in the United States. In Canada, rear-end collisions account for 80 percent of whiplash and other soft tissue injuries. Recent advancements in safety systems to prevent neck whiplash injuries are available in many European vehicles, and these strict standards are leading to many innovations in whiplash protection in the U.S. As a result, there is a proposed update to FMVSS 202 to increase the requirements for head restraints on US vehicles. For more information visit http://www.i-car.com/html_pages/about_icar/current_events_news/advantage/advantage_online_archives/2005/053105.html

CDC Calls For Efforts To Reduce Binge Drinking

A new report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that despite a decline in self-reported alcohol-impaired driving (AID) during the mid-1990s, it has increased substantially since the turn of the century. Since AID is strongly associated with binge drinking, CDC researchers are calling for interventions to prevent both AID and binge drinking. In 2002, there were 17,419 deaths and an estimated 258,000 injuries due to alcohol-related crashes along with 1.5 million arrests for AID. At the current rate, an estimated three out of every 10 Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash in their lifetime.

Pedestrians At High-Risk For Hit-And-Run Crashes

Hit-and-run drivers kill nearly 1,500 people each year, and according to a new report by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, pedestrians are at the greatest risk. The new study shows that about 11 percent of all police-reported crashes involve a hit-and-run driver. The Foundation points out that fatal hit-and-run incidents occur most often on the weekends and during the evening hours. Read the full article at <http://www.theautochannel.com/news/2005/05/17/085916.html>

Automaker Launches New Safety System

At a time when many automakers are focusing on developing crash avoidance technology, Toyota is launching a new system of safety technologies that prepare for a crash. The automaker is preparing to launch its "Pre-Collision System," which can detect objects in the road and activate the vehicle's other safety devices. The system uses radar and an array of antennas and sensors to scan the road some 500 feet ahead, searching for possible collisions. It reads speed, steering angle and yaw rate and when it determines a crash is imminent; it tightens the belts, and puts the brake assist and the suspension on alert. Read the full article at <http://www.autoweek.com/article.cms?articleId=102502>

New Steering Wheel Skin Sensor Checks Alcohol Consumption

A new sensor installed on steering wheels or in glove compartments that tests a driver's skin to determine alcohol consumption could help keep alcohol-impaired drivers off the roads. The \$600 sensor prevents a vehicle from starting or running if the driver is over the legal alcohol limit. The "skin sensor" is different from the breath alcohol ignition interlock system, which requires a driver to blow into an instrument that measures alcohol in the breath. The inventor spent 12 years developing the sensor after his then-teenage son was involved in a traffic crash involving alcohol and suffered minor brain damage. Read the full article at <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory?id=802262&CMP=OTC-RSSFeeds0312>

Study Analyzes Effect Of Control Buttons On Drivers' Visual Behavior

Buttons are frequently used as a type of control in vehicles, however little is known about how the usage of buttons affects the visual behavior of the driver. A new study analyzed the effect of push button location on the driver's visual time off the road and safety perception while driving. The researchers found that time off the road increased significantly as the angle increased between the normal line of sight and the button locations. Buttons located close to the gear stick, produced a shorter time off the road.

Source: Ergonomics. Authors: T. Dukic, L. Hanson, K. Holmqvist, and C. Wartenberg

News from USDOT

President Signs One-Month Transportation Authorization Extension Bill

The President signed a one-month extension of funding for national highway and transit programs. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century expired on September 30, 2003, but has received a series of short-term extensions as Congress and the Administration continue to work on different options for reauthorization of many of the nation's surface transportation programs. The current extension expires June 30, 2005.

NHTSA Releases "Ease-of-Use" Ratings For Child Safety Seats

NHTSA has released the results of its annual survey on the ease-of-use of child passenger safety seats. The 2005 survey rated 92 child passenger safety seats from 14 different manufacturers. NHTSA began rating child restraint systems, which include booster seats, in 2003 -- using a grading system of "A," "B," or "C" to denote how easy it is to use the safety seats. For more information visit <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/CPS/CSSRating/Index.cfm>

Mobile Technology Causes Driver Distraction, Leads To Crashes

New research from NHTSA and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute found that using a cell phone behind the wheel is a key cause of traffic crashes and that hands-free devices provide little safety benefit. The 100-car study showed that crashes were often preceded by distraction, and the most frequent distraction was the use of a cell phone or other electronic device. Read the full article at <http://www.detnews.com/2005/autosinsider/0506/09/A01-210098.htm>

NHTSA Re-Issues 15-Passenger Van Warning Amid Rollover Concerns

New research that reinforces ongoing concerns about 15-passenger vans has prompted NHTSA to reissue its consumer warning pertaining to safety problems with these vehicles. This is NHTSA's third warning on these vehicles in the last four years. The new report specifically addresses improper tire maintenance on the larger vans, after it was determined that 74 percent of all 15-passenger vans had "significantly misinflated tires." This is in contrast to passenger cars, of which 39 percent were found to have substantially misinflated tires. NHTSA stresses research that shows improper tire inflation can affect handling characteristics, increasing the possibility of 15-passenger van rollover crashes.

Work-Life:

New Legislation Proposes Limitations On Teen Driving

A new bill entitled, the "Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act," proposes to set a national minimum safety standard for teenage driving laws, including establishing a graduated driver's license program for all 50 states, restricting nighttime driving, and limiting the number of passengers a teen driver can transport without adult supervision. Meanwhile, many states—including Maryland,

Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Connecticut, Montana, Wyoming and Hawaii are addressing the issue locally and have altered their laws to protect their teen drivers.

Study Investigates State Laws And Older Drivers

After teenage male drivers, elderly individuals have the highest per capita motor vehicle fatality rate in the United States. A new study examines the effects of changes in state laws dealing with license renewal, seat belt use, speed limits and driving while intoxicated on fatalities among older drivers aged 65 and over. The study found that in-person license renewal reduced fatalities among older drivers, while vision tests, road tests, and the length of license renewal cycle generally did not. In terms of policies, seat belt laws were generally the only policies that reduced older driver fatalities. The results were noteworthy because a number of policies that have been effective towards increasing young driver safety are not relevant to older drivers, implying that policy makers must think about other laws to improve older driver safety.

Source: Health Econ. Authors: M.A. Morrissey and D.C. Grabowski

Can 'Black Box' Technology Help Parents Monitor Teen Drivers?

A growing number of highway safety advocates are calling for the use of high-tech "black boxes" in cars as a means for concerned parents to monitor the driving of their teen drivers. The black box has a memory card that can be removed and plugged into a home computer. The parent can then download a detailed report — from seat-belt use, to how fast the car traveled, to the use of turn signals. The device also warns the driver when he or she exceeds safety thresholds while braking or turning. However, the technology has yet to catch on in households, with many parents unaware that such technology exists. In addition, many teens have objected to the devices, calling them an invasion of their privacy. More info.... http://www.usatoday.com/money/autos/2005-03-02-teens-autos-parents-usat_x.htm

"USA Today" gathered a panel of experts and others close to the issue in a roundtable discussion to address the teen driving issue. To view the discussion visit http://www.usatoday.com/money/autos/2005-06-02-teen-drivers-usat_x.htm

Researchers Test Out Teen Driving Simulator

Researchers at Kansas State University are conducting research to find out if time spent in a high-tech "driving simulator could help improve teen driver training and make them safer drivers. The simulator includes the front half of a car and is designed to recreate a realistic environment, complete with working CD player and gear shifter. Images of roads, buildings, other cars, and pedestrians are projected onto screens surrounding the simulator. Read the full article at <http://www.healthday.com/view.cfm?id=525932>

Study: Front Seat Air Bags Endanger Teen Passengers

A new study conducted by researchers at Oregon Health Sciences University suggests that teens are better off staying out of the front seat of air bag equipped cars until they are almost old enough to get behind the wheel themselves. Currently, federally mandated warning labels warn of the risk for air bag injuries for children 12 and under. However, the new study found that the injury risk remains high through age 14. NHTSA reports that more than 150 children through age 11 have died from air bag injuries, however, little is known about teens. The study suggests that age might be a better indicator of risk from air bag bags than height or weight. Read the full article at <http://www.detnews.com/2005/autosinsider/0506/08/0auto-205309.htm>

International Traffic Safety News:

UK Considers Charging Motorists To Prevent Road Gridlock

In an effort to prevent gridlock, the UK Transport Secretary is proposing an aggressive scheme to track motorists by satellite and charge them based on their roadway use. The number of cars on the road in the UK has surged over the past decade, and it is estimated that the time drivers spend in their cars could rise by 20 percent by 2010. A feasibility study by the Department for Transport concluded that charging all motorists could cut UK traffic by 4 percent - enough to reduce the amount of time drivers spend in jams by as much as 46 percent. Still, no other country has attempted nationwide charging and the satellite technology needed to track cars accurately is still in its infancy. Read the full article at http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1499825,00.html

Bilingual Signs Pass Road Test In Canada

According to new research by the government of Ontario, bilingual road signs are just as easy to read as monolingual signs. However, the words have to be laid out clearly, as the findings implied an increased risk of crashes if the languages on the signs are not easy to distinguish. Ontario will soon be introducing bilingual signs for variable messages such as warnings of traffic congestion, crashes, or lane departures. Read the full article at

http://icwales.icnetwork.co.uk/0100news/0200wales/tm_objectid=15595653&method=full&siteid=50082&headline=bilingual-road-signs--easy-to-read-as-one-language-signs--name_page.html

Transport Canada Releases Seat Belt Use Survey Results

Based on the results of its 2004 survey of seat belt use in rural areas, Transport Canada reports that almost 87 percent of all occupants of light-duty trucks buckle up. The figure is up 2 percent from the previous study in 2002, but remains short of the national goal of a 95 percent usage rate. View the report at <http://www.tc.gc.ca/roadsafety/tp2436/rs200501/pdf/2005-01E.pdf>

Police Officer: Text Messaging 'Hidden Epidemic' On Roadways

An Australian police officer has called the use of mobile phones—specifically to send text messages—while behind the wheel a “hidden epidemic” putting lives at risk. Citing a study at the Monash University Accident Research Centre, young drivers who send text messages while driving take their eyes of the road four times more than other motorists. In addition, the study found that text-messaging drivers spend 12 out of every 30 seconds with their eyes diverted from the road. Drivers in the study also made 140 percent more incorrect lane changes by not noticing or correctly reading signs when text messaging. Read the full article at

http://bendigo.yourguide.com.au/detail.asp?class=news&subclass=local&category=general%20news&story_id=398533&m=2&y=2005

Doctors Face New Role: Assessing The Fitness To Drive

According to a new article, as the population ages and licensing criteria changes, many general practitioners may have to write reports about their patients' fitness to drive, making it increasingly important for them to understand the medical and legal issues involved. Several medical conditions that commonly give rise to problems include: epilepsy, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Adequate reporting can help patients avoid becoming involved in traffic crashes.

Source: Australia Family Physician. Author: M. Odell